



## *The Insider*

[www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski](http://www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski)

### **Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10**

**June 12, 2009**

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at [senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov) or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a location near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See the schedule below for details.

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#### **Mickey's Blog: Switalski Reform Removed From Judiciary Budget**

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These are times unlike any other in Michigan. The state is facing unprecedented economic struggles due to the downsizing of the automotive industry and its implications on other sectors of the economy. The state budget faces significant shortfalls as a result. It has become pretty clear to me that Michigan government requires a dramatic downsizing, and I introduced a proposal on June 4, 2009 that would reduce the number of judges in Michigan by attrition to save taxpayers over \$10 million.

Under current law, once a judge reaches the age of 70, the judge can continue to serve the rest of their term, but can no longer stand for election. That creates an opportunity to downsize the judiciary to a size that fits Michigan's shrinking resources. There are nine circuit judges across the state who will be ineligible for election in 2010. I proposed that the state should not fill these positions and save \$1.25 million for the state's General Fund.

At a time when we are cutting revenue sharing to the counties and making other significant cuts, these reductions may be met with cheers by the affected counties because each judge costs the county a million dollars to fund the court officer, the judicial secretary, the court reporter, and judicial benefits, in addition to the two prosecuting attorneys who staff the courtroom. That comes to about \$10 million in savings to locals.

Savings in the judiciary could also be made either by delaying filling vacancies, combining areas of jurisdiction, and utilizing cross-assignments of judicial positions. Part-time, temporary, and visiting judges could also be used to manage the docket. But the status quo is not sustainable. The sooner we reconcile ourselves to changing operations to fit our new economic realities, the sooner we create the foundation necessary for Michigan's revival.

In this spirit, earlier this week, I was successful on the Senate floor in getting an amendment adopted in the judiciary budget that would achieve these savings. My amendment would allow counties to delay



filling the opening and save a million dollars for each judicial position. There were two judicial positions in Macomb County and nine across the state that would be affected. On Thursday, the Senate majority reconsidered the vote of which my amendment was adopted and rejected it along party lines, 21-14.

During the debate, I made the following statement on the Senate floor (as quoted from the Senate Journal, June 11, 2009):

“I call on all my fiscally responsible colleagues, all my colleagues who are advocates of reducing the size of government to stand up and be counted on my amendment. This provision made sense yesterday, and it was in the budget. I would ask, what has changed in 24 hours?”

Let me address what this amendment does. It gives the local funding unit, usually the county together with the State Court Administrative Office, the option to delay filling judicial vacancies created when judges turn 70 and are barred under Michigan law from seeking re-election. It does not affect vacancies subject to gubernatorial appointments in any way. The Governor would still retain all powers and opportunities to make judicial appointments that she currently has.

There are currently nine such vacancies across the state for the 2010 election. Shouldn't they have the right, during this economic crisis, to delay filling those vacancies until the election of 2012? After all, it costs locals \$1 million per judge because the county is responsible for funding the support staff of court officers, judicial secretary, court clerk, court recorder, and a prosecutor, along with the judicial retirement and operational costs. The state pays the salary at \$140,000 per judge. So we have nine of these across the state. They are in Oakland, Macomb, Ingham, Allegan, St. Clair, Bay, Ottawa, and Saginaw Counties. Two are in Macomb County, and let me describe what the effect is.

The county of Macomb is currently \$9 million in the hole, and that is after they raised taxes. Shouldn't they have this option, especially after we are cutting revenue sharing and their property tax revenue is plummeting? Macomb County is asking its circuit court for \$900 thousand in cuts. Shouldn't the county have the option for meeting this target to have everything on the table? Or should they be forced to lay off Friend of the Court workers, referees, and support staff who make the whole system work, while delaying filling judicial vacancies they could muddle through without?

By approving this amendment, we would not be forcing them to spend money they don't have. We are stopping them from making the reductions that could balance their budgets. We are stopping them from downsizing government. This is antithetical to what we profess daily about fiscal responsibility. This is not a Republican or a Democratic issue. It is an issue of responsible budget cutters versus profligate spenders.

I have heard many speakers in these chambers about the need to downsize government; about how we are not the state we used to be when GM and Chrysler dominated the auto industry; about how we have to shrink government to match our rapidly contracting revenues. Here is a concrete chance to do that. If we will pass this amendment and co-sponsor the implementing legislation to accomplish this reform that I will introduce this month, we can make this government work.

The State Court Administrative Office supports this; the Macomb County Board of Commissioners supports this and will offer a resolution to us shortly. Oakland County is asking for this option. The Michigan Association of Counties and the Judges Association will be meeting this month and I predict will be supporting this policy.

Please join them and support this amendment. I have made two improvements from our earlier version. I have added the introductory phrase, “It is the intent of the legislature.” It is our intent that locals in the



State Court Administrative Office be able to do this, and I have specified that when they delay it, they can delay it for two years. So those are changes from the earlier version of this amendment. I hope all members will support it.”

Despite the score being Government 1, Taxpayers 0 at the end of the first inning, I plan on continuing the fight for the whole game. This is not a Republican or Democratic issue but rather a common sense way to reform government at a time when the state does not have the resources to do everything. What do you think of my proposal? Please feel free to share your thoughts with me.

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## **Mickey's Ends and Notes**

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### **FREE SUMMER MEALS AVAILABLE FOR KIDS**

Kids throughout Michigan can enjoy free healthy meals this summer thanks to the Summer Food Service Program. Administered by the Michigan Department of Education, this federally-funded program fills the summer hunger gap for thousands of Michigan children. Last year, around 69,000 kids ate free meals or snacks at approved summer food program sites in their neighborhoods. Research shows a direct relationship between good nutrition and learning. The Summer Food Service Program is a key building block in Michigan communities to develop healthy, happy kids who are ready to learn.

The Summer Food Service Program is targeted to all children up to age 18 living in eligible communities. To find the Summer Food Service Program site nearest you, log on to [www.michigan.gov/sfsp](http://www.michigan.gov/sfsp) and contact one of the 199 sponsors throughout the state for the dates, times, and locations of their free summer meals for kids.

### **FREE RX CARD**

The Michigan Retailers Association is offering a new program that would help people save money on prescription drugs. The Free Rx Card is available and free to everyone, with no age, income, or other eligibility requirements. Cardholders will be able to receive discounts averaging 35 percent off the cost of a prescription, with savings of up to 75 percent off generic prescriptions.

More than 2,000 pharmacies in Michigan-including all major chains and many independents- are participating in the program. Anyone can obtain a card by visiting the Michigan Retailers Association website at [http://www.retailers.com/memberservices/rxc\\_card\\_form.html](http://www.retailers.com/memberservices/rxc_card_form.html) and downloading a card. The website also can be used to locate a nearby participating pharmacy and to determine the discounted price.

In addition, Pfizer Inc. announced earlier this month a new program to provide free medicine for newly unemployed residents and their families. The program is open for enrollment through December 31, 2009 and applies to people who have become unemployed since January 1, 2009, prescribed and taking a Pfizer medicine for at least three months prior to becoming unemployed and enrolling in the program, lack prescription drug coverage, and can attest to financial hardship. For more information, contact Pfizer at #1-866-706-2400 or visit their website at [www.PfizerHelpfulAnswers.com](http://www.PfizerHelpfulAnswers.com).

### **AMERICAN RED CROSS LOCAL CHAPTER'S NURSE ASSISTANT TRAINING (NAT) PROGRAM AVAILABLE TO RESIDENTS**

The American Red Cross is one of the nation's leading health and safety training organizations offering lifesaving skills that help to prevent and respond to emergencies. In the state of Michigan, the Southeastern Michigan Chapter trains almost 150,000 residents each year in these skills, which is also highlighted by the Red Cross' Nurse Assistance Training (NAT) program.



Over the past two years, the Red Cross NAT program has helped hundreds of southeast Michigan's unemployed residents obtain new jobs in the health care industry. For example, the Chapter's Nurse Assistant Training Program is a three-week course combining classroom-delivered and on-site training at area health care facilities. Upon completion of course work, the students are given valuable knowledge to take the State of Michigan certification competency test. Last year, over 1,650 tri-county residents were enrolled in the program, which is currently being offered at several locations around the region, including the **Red Cross' Macomb Service Center in Warren** (located at 13260 East 11 Mile Road between Hoover and Schoenherr Roads). To learn more about this exciting program, please visit [www.semredcross.org](http://www.semredcross.org) or contact #(313) 833-4440 or toll free #(877) 788-0014.

### **HELP IS OUT THERE: STATE AND LOCAL JOB PROGRAMS FOR JOB SEEKERS**

The recent Chrysler and General Motors bankruptcies mean that more families will need job search and family assistance programs. There is a lot of help available for job seekers, but unfortunately many people don't know how to access these programs. I hope that readers will find the following information helpful. These programs are available for job seekers:

- Career Education and Workforce Programs (Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth). For job programs for veterans, people transitioning from welfare to work, specialized job placement programs, and dislocated/laid off worker assistance, visit the website at <http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1679---,00.html>.
- Rapid Response Program (Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth): 1-517-373-6234. This program begins when Rapid Response is notified of a plant closing or mass lay-off, and helps people with their job search and new training they may need. Visit the website at [http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1678\\_2665---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1678_2665---,00.html).
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC): The Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center (MI-SBTDC), 2727 Second Ave., Suite 120, Detroit, 1-313-967-9295. This office provides counseling, training, research and advocacy for new ventures, new start-up businesses, and existing small businesses.
- Unemployment Insurance Agency. To file your claim by phone, call #1-866-500-0017. To inquire about your claim, call 1-866-500-0017 and press 3. To find answers to general questions about unemployment benefits and to print forms, log on to [www.michigan.gov/uia](http://www.michigan.gov/uia).
- Michigan Talent Bank: 1-888-253-6855. This site lists new job openings monthly and allows people to post their resume. Visit the website at: [https://www.michworks.org/mtb/user/MTB\\_EMPL.EntryMainPage](https://www.michworks.org/mtb/user/MTB_EMPL.EntryMainPage).
- The United Way of Southeastern Michigan. The United Way runs the 211 Help Line which connects people with helpful services just as 911 connects people with emergency services. People simply dial 211 (or 1-800-552-1183) and use the United Way as their link to local and state programs. 211 can make referrals to agencies that can help with job training, rent, mortgage payments, and the cost of food or prescriptions. 211 is a lifeline for people in difficult situations trying to navigate their way through local and state programs.



## **DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES ANNOUNCES NEW WEBSITE FOR CHILD SUPPORT INFORMATION**

The Michigan Department of Human Services has announced a new website for parents that pay or receive child support payments in Michigan. The website, which can be found at <http://apps.michigan.gov/MiCase/public/Home.aspx>, allows parents to log in and receive updates about their payments including information about amounts owed, payment summaries, child support case information, scheduled hearing dates, and Friend of the Court contact information.

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### **Coffee Hours**

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\*In response to requests from constituents, I have added coffee hours in Roseville and during the daytime. Here are my next scheduled coffee hours. Please feel to stop on by or make an appointment by calling my office.

<b>June 29</b> <b>1:30-2:30 p.m.</b>  <b>Senator Switalski's District Office</b> (31513 Gratiot, Suite B) Roseville	<b>July 27</b> <b>7-8 p.m.</b>  <b>Clinton-Macomb Public Library</b> (35891 South Gratiot) Clinton Township
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### **Mickey's TV Insider Show**

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Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

#### **Sterling Heights**

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

#### **Clinton Township**

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

#### **Utica**

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

#### **Roseville**

Various Times-check local listings  
(Comcast Channel 18/WOW Channel 10)



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## Contact My Office

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